Women with disabilities

2013/2065(INI) - 14/10/2013 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted the own-initiative report by Angelika WERTHMANN (ADLE, AT) on women with disabilities.

Members recall that 80 million people with disabilities living in the Union of which 46 million are women and girls, who make up **16% of the total female population of the EU**. Women with disabilities were multiply disadvantaged, facing significant difficulties in obtaining access to adequate housing, healthcare, public transport, education, vocational training and employment, experiencing inequality in access to credit and other productive resources, and rarely participating in decision-making processes.

Consequently, Members stressed that strategies, policies and legislative initiatives to ensure non-discrimination and equal opportunities must be drawn up for such persons. They underlined the importance of **mainstreaming gender disability in gender policies, programmes and measures** and regretted the fact that the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 did not include an integrated gender perspective or a separate chapter on gender-specific disability policies, and that the Strategy for Equality between women and men 2010-2015 did not do so either. They urged those Member States that have not yet ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol to do so.

Optimising resources: Members highlighted the importance of optimising the use of EU funding instruments, particularly the **Structural Funds**, in order to promote accessibility and non-discrimination regarding persons with disabilities.

Fight against discrimination: the report stressed the fact that numerous studies had shown that women with disabilities suffered double discrimination on grounds both of their gender and their disability, and emphasised that the overlap of such discrimination had particularly negative effects on women and girls with disabilities. It called on the Commission and the Member States to make more ambitious efforts to remove the remaining obstacles.

Members insisted that inclusion presupposes that **stereotypes are countered**. They pointed out that the media play an important role in bringing about a change for the better in the public's attitude towards women with disabilities.

Fight against sexual violence: Members invited Member States to Calls on the Member States to consider sexual violence a **serious crime** liable to prosecution, especially in the case of women with mental disabilities.

The report stressed that, in order to prevent the seclusion, abandonment, neglect and segregation of girls with disabilities, it is necessary to launch information campaigns for families. Where children with disabilities cannot be cared for by their immediate families, the authorities should seek to ensure that, as an alternative, they can be cared for within their wider family entourage or provide them with community care in a family environment;

Support measures: the report calls for the following measures:

- **housing,** by hastening a universal design intended to cater for the basic daily needs of women with disabilities;
- greater access to **decent living conditions**, including mobility, access to public and social services, and participation in public life;
-

- barrier-free accessibility to the **transport** infrastructure, the vehicles and the information and reservation formats;
- **accessibility to the internet and social media** particularly readability of all public websites for people with visual impairment;
- **democratic participation** through the provision of adequately adapted facilities and to empower women's active involvement and participation;
- **personal assistance** to ensure autonomous living for women with disabilities.

Members also recalled that every step in a woman's life entailed not only opportunities but also responsibilities and that in this sense women often have to endure a **disproportionate burden** in terms of **pregnancy** and childbearing. They must face the negative implications of pregnancy, especially in cases when fathers did not assume their responsibilities. Members recalled that in a family **both parents should share the same responsibilities**. They emphasised that **women and girls with disabilities must be informed of their rights** so that they can make decisions for themselves.

The report called for special training of all medical professionals dealing with women with disabilities and with disabled migrant girls and women.

Sexuality, pregnancy and abortion: women with disabilities should enjoy the same rights and opportunities as are offered to women without disabilities so as to avoid any discouragement from becoming pregnant. In any event, Members noted that **forced sterilisation and coerced abortion** are forms of violence against women and constitute forms of inhuman and degrading treatment that Member States must eradicate and strongly condemn. Women and girls with disabilities must be allowed to enjoy their sexuality as freely as people without impairments, and fulfil their wish either to have or not to have children, take responsibility for their sexual behaviour and have access to education on sexuality.

Specialised support, including childcare assistance, should be provided to women with disabilities, particularly to women with an intellectual impairment.

For women who have been subject to violence, including sexual violence, in care homes and mental hospitals, Members called for inquiries and with a view to taking the appropriate measures.

Members also stressed that contraceptive methods **must never be administered, nor a pregnancy legally terminated, against the will of a woman or girl with disabilities**. The latter must have the right to give their informed consent and all cases of forced sterilisation must be condemned.

Protection of women with disabilities: Members invited the EU and Member States to take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect women and girls with disabilities, both within and outside the home, from all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse and to facilitate their access to justice, taking into consideration their specific needs, including assistive devices/ They regretted that EU and national legislation to prevent exploitation, violence and abuse **often lacks a focus on disability.**

The report urged the Commission to launch a comprehensive strategy to fight violence against women, as requested by Parliament in its resolution of 5 April 2011 and to present **a legislative criminal law instrument to combat gender-based violence,** including the protection of rights of disabled women in cases of sexual abuse and violence. They must be able to file a complaint and be transferred immediately to a temporary full-time care centre. Members proposed the introduction of trial procedures **specifically tailored to meet the needs of women and girls with disabilities**, including the provision of NGO assistance.

Access to work and education: the report invited Member States to encourage and ensure access to **all types of formal, informal and lifelong education** and to the labour market for women and girls with disabilities. It urged Member States to provide training and information to teachers, trainers, senior civil servants, and employers and proposed effective use of the European Social Fund so as to improve the levels of inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in the labour market.

Legislative measures are recommended to ensure the participation of women with disabilities in the labour market (particularly though part-time employment). They should have equal access to financing for the creation of small enterprises and other forms of self-employment. Employers were asked to make reasonable adjustments to workplaces and working conditions.

Member States are also asked to:

- pay special attention to boys and girls with disabilities or special needs in an educational context, in order to improve their integration and help reduce the school dropout rate to less than 10 %;
- provide the necessary funding and support for associations and organisations representing people with disabilities;
- provide the necessary specialised support to the families of women with disabilities.

Fight against poverty and social inclusion: Members called on Member States to take adequate measures to prevent women and girls with disabilities from slipping into poverty, by devising national appropriate programmes. Elderly women, who were confronted with diseases that bring about disability, should receive special attention. Members stressed that austerity measures should not penalize women with disabilities. Carers of these women must receive a proper salary and retirement pension. The Commission was asked to come up with a legislative proposal on carers' leave (or filial leave) that allowed people to take a period of leave to take care of ill, disabled or impaired family members.

Awareness-raising: the Commission and Member States were called upon to develop large-scale awareness-raising campaigns to make women and girls with disabilities more visible. Members urged the Commission to develop a more gender-sensitive approach in conducting the mid-term review of its European Disability Strategy 2010-2020.

They also called on the Commission, the Council and the Member States to adopt a horizontal anti-discrimination directive aimed at removing, in all areas of EU competence, the barriers which prevent disabled people, and especially disabled women and girls, from achieving their full potential for social participation and independence.

Also recommended were measures to support voluntary initiatives supporting human diversity as well as reliable statistics, and to provide adequate funding for NGOs dealing with the issue.

Disability and development: Members invited the Commission and the EEAS to mainstream disability in development policy and in projects in a coordinated way, and to promote initiatives aiming to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders to effectively implement international commitments to disability-inclusive development. Emphasising that women and girls with disabilities are more vulnerable than other people through armed conflicts, natural disasters and humanitarian crises, Members stressed that national and international agencies responsible for public health, disaster preparedness, emergency help and humanitarian aid need to be made aware of the rights and specific needs of women and girls with disabilities.

Funding must be provided for programmes targeting women and girls with disabilities. The rights of the latter should be included in third-country cooperation. Organisations active in this area should be supported.

Lastly, Members considered that, with regard to changing the situation of women and girls with disabilities, one of the main challenges lies in including disability in all programmes, measures and policies on gender, as well as devising and developing positive action measures to achieve progress for them, given that they are at a disadvantage.